

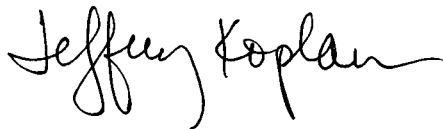
A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE CDC...

The popularity of youth sports in the United States, especially among girls, continues to grow. Therefore, sports activities are a great way to reach our nation's young people with information about how to make important health decisions related to tobacco use, physical activity, and good nutrition. Because health-related behaviors are usually established in childhood, positive choices need to be promoted before damaging behaviors start or become a habit.

Every day, over 6,000 young people smoke their first cigarette. If current youth tobacco use trends continue, 5 million of today's young people will die of tobacco-related diseases. Smokeless tobacco use by adolescents is associated with health problems ranging from gum disease to oral cancer. Nearly all first use of tobacco occurs before high school graduation. This finding suggests that if adolescents can be kept tobacco-free, most will never start using tobacco.

We appreciate your interest in *The Tobacco-Free Sports Playbook* and hope the examples will inspire you to join us in reaching out to our nation's young people with messages about the importance of choosing a healthy, active, and tobacco-free lifestyle. Helping our young people practice healthy behaviors will prevent many premature deaths. We welcome your participation in this campaign to promote sports participation as a healthy and positive alternative to tobacco use through programs involving health departments, community organizations, schools, and teams.

By working together, we have the opportunity to improve the health of young people nationwide.



Jeffrey P. Koplan, MD, MPH
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